

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

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8 September 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable Communist Reactions to Use of the  
OXCART for Reconnaissance over Cuba

Assumptions: (a) Four flights: two per month for two months  
(b) The vehicle would be detected and identified

We think it most likely that there would be no attempt to shoot down the aircraft, and that the Communists would either make no public issue of the matter, or would keep public controversy in a very low key. If they did make an issue at all, it would more likely take the form of private warning to the US against use of OXCART over the USSR. But there are other possibilities which are included in the discussion below.

1. The Soviets know of the existence of a US aircraft such as the OXCART: we believe that they do not know the details of its capabilities. One virtually certain reaction to the flights would be for the Soviets to take measures to gain more information about the vehicle.

2. The Soviets might be puzzled as to why we were using this vehicle at this time, for returns which would probably not seem to them worth the cost of revealing more of the aircraft's capabilities. They would wonder why we chose to introduce this new factor into the Cuban situation, which is quiet and in which

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they probably consider that we are getting all the intelligence we need from unpublicized and unmolested U-2 flights. We think their most likely interpretations would be that the flights represented either (a) a stage in the routine replacement of a U-2 capability which was obsolescent, or (b) final trials before use of the aircraft over North Vietnam, over China, or even over the USSR.

3. We think it unlikely that the Soviets (or Cubans) would attempt to shoot the OXCART down with an SA-2 missile. We see no reason why the OXCART should be attacked when the U-2 is not.\*

4. The real question is whether the Soviets would decide to make an issue of the matter -- publicly or privately. They might do so out of concern that the US was preparing to employ the vehicle over the USSR, and out of a desire to get US assurances -- public or private -- renouncing any such purpose. (Any Soviet representations on this subject, public or private, would make use of the public statement by President Kennedy in January 1961 that flights of American aircraft penetrating the airspace of the Soviet Union had been suspended since May 1960, and that he had ordered that they not be resumed.) It is also possible that they might use it as an occasion for raising the

\* We are advised that any such attempt against the OXCART would almost certainly be unsuccessful.

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whole question of overhead reconnaissance (including that by satellites); or more generally for showing a harder line towards the US with respect to Vietnam.

5. On the whole, we think it unlikely that the Soviets would want to heat up the international situation over this issue -- if only because it would involve embarrassment about past U-2 flights over Cuba, and uncertainties about how to deal with OXCART in the future. Hence we doubt that they would create a public furor, or reopen the whole question of overhead reconnaissance. There is about an even chance that they would make private representations to the US, warning against use of the vehicle over the USSR.

6. Whatever the desires of the US and Soviet governments, something about flights of this vehicle over Cuba might become public, either by Cuban declaration or by leaks to the press. In such case the Soviets would surely declare their ability to deal with the aircraft over the USSR. If there were substantial publicity, the Soviets might feel constrained to make a greater issue of it; we think they would prefer not to do so.

7. If the vehicle came down in Cuba (which we are informed is extremely unlikely) and especially if the pilot were alive, there would certainly be a great deal of propaganda and publicity.

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The chances of Soviet actions along the lines mentioned above would substantially increase; we still do not think the Soviets would create an international crisis. If the aircraft came down at sea and was not recovered by Cubans, Communist reactions would probably be the same as if it had returned to its base.

8. There is one other slight possibility worth canvassing. The Cubans may be sufficiently annoyed by U-2 reconnaissance, and sufficiently eager to do something about it, to seize upon use of the OXCART as evidence that the US itself had changed a static situation. They might then consider that it gave them license to use SA-2 missiles against U-2 aircraft subsequently overflying their country. We believe that they would not think the risk worth taking; it does not make much sense from their point of view; moreover they would almost certainly be restrained by the Soviets.

9. Chinese Communist and North Vietnamese reactions would be limited at most to propaganda if the affair became public. Both countries would doubtless expect the vehicle to be used over them, but the North Vietnamese at least expect direct US reconnaissance in any case. We do not believe that either country

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would take the event as evidence of US intentions to escalate war in the Far East, thought both might issue propaganda to this effect.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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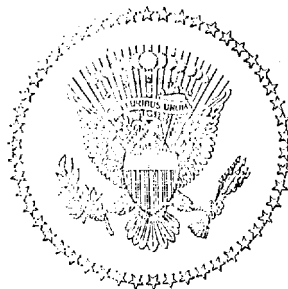
PUBLIC PAPERS OF THE PRESIDENTS  
OF THE UNITED STATES

John F. Kennedy

*Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and  
Statements of the President*

JANUARY 20 TO DECEMBER 31, 1961

1961



UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
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## 8 The President's News Conference of *January 25, 1961*

THE PRESIDENT. I have several announcements to make first.

[1.] I have a statement about the Geneva negotiations for an atomic test ban. These negotiations, as you know, are scheduled to begin early in February. They are of great importance and we will need more time to prepare a clear American position. So we are consulting with other governments and are asking to have it put off until late March. As you know, Mr. John McCloy is my principal adviser in this field, and he has organized a distinguished panel of experts, headed by Dr. James Fisk of the Bell Laboratories—and Mr. Salinger will have a list of the names at the end of the conference—who are going to study previous positions that we've taken in this field, and also recommend to Mr. McCloy, for my guidance, what our position will be in late March when we hope the tests will resume.

[2.] Secondly, the United States Government has decided to increase substantially its contribution towards relieving the famine in the Congo. This will be done by increasing the supply of cornmeal and dry milk, by adding contributions of rice, and by airlifting a thousand tons of food supplies, seeds, and hospital supplies from a number of African nations to the Congo.

It is the intention of the United States Government to meet fully the emergency requirements of the Congo for rice, corn, dry milk and other foodstuffs in our surplus stocks. Assurances have been received from the United Nations that with the help of this program the flow of supplies will be adequate to relieve the distress. The United States Government will cooperate fully to

help the United Nations prevent famine in the Congo.<sup>1</sup>

[3.] Third, I am happy to be able to announce that Capt. Freeman B. Olmstead and Capt. John R. McKone, members of the crew of the United States Air Force RB-47 aircraft who have been detained by Soviet authorities since July 1, 1960, have been released by the Soviet Government and are now en route to the United States.

The United States Government is gratified by this decision of the Soviet Union and considers that this action of the Soviet Government removes a serious obstacle to improvement of Soviet-American relations.

Our deepest sympathy and understanding go to the families of the men of the RB-47 who gave their lives in the service of their country. At the same time, I am sure that all Americans join me in rejoicing with the Olmstead and McKone families. The families, as well as the men, comported themselves in these trying times in a way which is truly in the best traditions of the military services of the United States. Restraint in these conditions is obviously not easy. But they can be assured that they have contributed in large measure to the final achievement of the objective which we all sought—release of the men.

[4.] Q. Mr. President, this RB-47 case was regarded by the Russians as an overflight although we took a different position. In the light of this announcement, what will be your general policy on overflights and on such things as the U-2 case, or the U-2

<sup>1</sup> A White House release, dated January 25, describes more fully the Emergency Food Program for the Congo. The release is printed in the Department of State Bulletin (vol. 44, p. 218).

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flights? Do you conceive of circumstances which might warrant resumption of such things as the U-2 flight?

THE PRESIDENT. The Soviet Government is fully aware of United States Government views with respect to the distinction between the question of the United States Air Force RB-47 and the incident which occurred over Soviet territory on May 1, 1960, involving an American U-2 type aircraft. Flights of American aircraft penetrating the air space of the Soviet Union have been suspended since May 1960. I have ordered that they not be resumed.

[5.] Q. Mr. President there have been reports that Mr. Khrushchev might come to the United Nations General Assembly for the resumption of the disarmament debates sometime in March. If this were to happen, would you welcome a visit by him to Washington for a get-acquainted meeting?

THE PRESIDENT. I've not heard officially of any proposal by Mr. Khrushchev to come to the United States. I've merely seen newspaper reports and I feel that it would be more appropriate to wait until we had some indication of whether Mr. Khrushchev was planning to come to the United Nations.

[6.] Q. Mr. President, can you tell us something about what your role was, if you had one, in the release of these fliers? Did this come about as a consequence of some action you took?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, this matter has been under discussion by the American Ambassador and Mr. Khrushchev on one occasion and representatives of the Soviet foreign ministry since this weekend. The fliers were released as of 2 a.m. yesterday morning, but in the plane taking off there was a tire that was blown and therefore the plane did not take off. Our last information is that it took off at 5 o'clock our time this afternoon. It

will fly to Amsterdam and then we expect the fliers to be brought to the United States tomorrow afternoon.

[7.] Q. Mr. President, one of your task forces recommended that you resist any early move toward general disarmament negotiations until a firm and fixed U.S. policy could be worked out. What is your reaction to that report and how much time do you think it might take to get a firm fixed U.S. position?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, Mr. McCloy has responsibility over the area of disarmament as well as nuclear testing. He has, as I've said, set up this committee—advisory committee—on nuclear testing. We expect to also get the American position clearer on general disarmament. There is not the same deadline that we've been facing on the nuclear testing where we were supposed to resume in early February, but I can state that this was a matter which was discussed early this week by the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State and Mr. McCloy and we are preparing clarification of American positions on disarmament.

[8.] Q. Mr. President, what more can you tell us about the long conversation that Ambassador Thompson had with Mr. Khrushchev, including whether the tone of that conversation was anywhere near as friendly as that of the messages that Khrushchev has sent you?

THE PRESIDENT. I would say the tone was friendly. And as a result of the conversations, as I've said, the decision was made to release the fliers. But the conversations were conducted in an atmosphere of civility.

Q. Could you give us any indication at all as to what other subjects were taken up in addition to the release of the RB-47 fliers?

THE PRESIDENT. No. I think that I have to stand on my previous statement.



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[9.] Q. Does your administration plan to take any steps to solve the problem at Fayette County, Tenn., where tenant farmers have been evicted from their homes because they voted last November and must now live in tents?

THE PRESIDENT. We are—the Congress, of course, enacted legislation which placed very clear responsibility on the executive branch to protect the right of voting. I supported that legislation. I am extremely interested in making sure that every American is given the right to cast his vote without prejudice to his rights as a citizen. And therefore I can state that this administration will pursue the problem of providing that protection with all vigor.

[10.] Q. Sir, would you please tell us how it was possible for you to do by Executive order what Mr. Benson always told us was impossible for him to do without more legislation? I refer to the order expanding the distribution of food to the unemployed and giving them more variety in the diet.

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I would not attempt to comment on Mr. Benson. I don't think there's any question of our rights to issue the Executive order under the authority given to us by the Constitution and by legislative action. I think we're within our rights. It is a judgment as to what is the best use to make of the funds that are available—the funds are quite limited. The diet which is being provided for the people who are unemployed is still inadequate. But nevertheless we have used the funds that are available to the maximum. And I don't think there's any question that we were within our rights.

[11.] Q. Mr. President, could you tell us how and when you learned that these fliers were going to be released?

THE PRESIDENT. I learned as a result of the conversations which Ambassador

Thompson had with the Soviet officials and therefore we were informed as to the date that they would be released—the time—yesterday.

[12.] Q. Mr. President, there has been some apprehension about the instantaneous broadcast of Presidential press conferences such as this one, the contention being that an inadvertent statement no longer correctible, as in the old days, could possibly cause some grave consequences. Do you feel there is any risk or could you give us some thought on that subject?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, it was my understanding that the statements made by the, by President Eisenhower, were on the record. There may have been a clarification that could have been issued afterwards but it still would have demonstrated, it still would have been on the record as a clarification, so that I don't think that the interests of our country are—it seems to me they're as well protected under this system as they were under the system followed by President Eisenhower. And this system has the advantage of providing more direct communication.

[13.] Q. On the question at issue would you consider reopening diplomatic relations with Cuba and are you considering such a step now?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, at the—take the last part first—we are not considering such a step at the present time. I may say that the United States is interested, and I think that this administration is extremely interested in movements in Latin America and Central America, or the Caribbean which provide a better life for the people. And if American interests may be damaged by those movements—or revolutions, or whatever term you want to use—we feel that this should be a matter that should be negotiated. What we are of course concerned

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about is when these movements are seized  
by external forces and directed not to im-  
proving the welfare of the people involved  
but towards imposing an ideology which is  
alien to this hemisphere. That is a matter of  
concern particularly when that intervention  
takes the form of military support which  
threatens the security and the peace of the  
Western Hemisphere.

Now, I'm hopeful that governments will  
be established throughout all of Latin  
America and governments which are estab-  
lished will, and I think nearly all of them  
do, share the same view that we have to pro-  
vide in this hemisphere a better life for the  
people involved, that we are interested in  
that, that we are concerned about it, that  
American policy will be directed towards  
that end. But we are also concerned that  
in the name of that peaceful revolution, when  
it's seized by aliens for their purposes, it's  
very difficult for the United States to carry  
on happy relations with those countries.

So in answer to your question we have no  
plan at present to resume diplomatic rela-  
tions with Cuba, because of the factors which  
are involved in that island.

[14.] Q. You said in the past, sir, that  
the President should be in the thick of the  
political battle, and I wondered, sir, if you  
could tell us what part you're playing in the  
effort to expand the Rules Committee and  
whether you feel your domestic program—  
whether the success of your domestic pro-  
gram in part depends on expanding the  
Rules Committee?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, the Constitution  
states that each house shall be the judge of  
its own rules, and therefore the Speaker of  
the House, Mr. Rayburn, has been extremely  
anxious that the House be permitted to  
settle this matter in its own way.

But it's no secret that—I would strongly  
believe that the Members of the House

should have an opportunity to vote them-  
selves on the programs which we will pre-  
sent. That, I think, is the reason the people  
selected them to go to the House of Repre-  
sentatives and to the Senate and selected me  
as President, so that we could present pro-  
grams and consider programs and vote on  
programs which are put forward for the  
benefit of the country.

Now I feel that it would be—I'm hopeful  
that whatever judgment is made by the  
Members of the House, that it will permit  
the Members to vote on these bills. This is  
a very difficult time in the life of our coun-  
try. Many controversial measures will be  
presented which will be in controversy and  
will be debated. But at the end the ma-  
jority of the Members of the House, the  
majority of the Members of the Senate, I  
hope, will have a chance to exercise their  
will, and that a small group of men will not  
attempt to prevent the Members from finally  
letting their judgments be known.

For example, we have the housing bill  
which is going to come before the Congress  
this year. We have an aid-to-education bill.  
We have legislation which will affect the  
income of farmers. Shouldn't the Members  
of the House themselves and not merely the  
members of the Rules Committee have a  
chance to vote on those measures? But the  
responsibility rests with the Members of the  
House, and I would not attempt in any way  
to infringe upon that responsibility. I  
merely give my view as an interested citi-  
zen. [Laughter]

[15.] Q. Are any plans being made to  
implement the recommendations in the  
Voorhees report on the Cuban refugee prob-  
lem? Secondly, do you plan to appoint  
somebody to continue Mr. Voorhees' work?

THE PRESIDENT. We are considering the  
recommendations of Mr. Voorhees and the  
whole problem of the Cuban refugees, but I

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don't have any statement to make on it at this time.

[16.] Q. Mr. President, what is the official Government position in regard to the Portuguese-seized ship? Can the Navy board it if and when it makes contact?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I believe that the location of the ship has been determined, and—[*aside to Mr. Salinger*—perhaps we could give the location of it—at the present time the instructions are for the Navy to continue its accompaniment of the ship. The *Santa Maria* has been located by Navy P2V aircraft, and the position is approximately 600 miles north of the mouth of the Amazon River. It is headed on a course of 117, a speed of 15 knots, and the exact position at 10 minutes after 4 was 10-35 north, 45-42 west. It will be trailed by aircraft and picked up by the destroyers of our African task force.

Now, there are Americans involved; and their lives are involved. But we have not given any instructions to the Navy to carry out any boarding operations. Though, of course, we are concerned about the lives of the Americans involved. And also we are concerned because the ship belongs to a country with which the United States has friendly relations.

[17.] Q. Mr. President, in consequence of Mr. Khrushchev's apparent indication last weekend of willingness to release the American fliers, have you sent any communication to him through Ambassador Thompson or otherwise?

THE PRESIDENT. Well—have I sent a message since the release of the fliers?

Q. Since his communication to us through Ambassador—

THE PRESIDENT. We have had several exchanges with the Soviet authorities. I do not believe that one has taken place since the release of the prisoners but that's partially

because there has been this delay about their leaving Moscow.

[18.] Q. Mr. President, there is meeting here now a nationwide group of labor, agriculture, and industry which wants to abolish all restraints of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act. They say that it robs us of gold, robs American workers of jobs. What is your position on such a proposal?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I think that their meeting here is well within their rights as citizens of the United States and I think that we should listen to their views. This is a matter of great concern. I do think we should be conscious of the fact, of course, that the balance of trade has been substantially in our favor in the last year. But we are continually concerned about those imports which adversely affect an entire industry, or adversely affect the employment of a substantial number of our citizens. The present laws—peril-point and escape clause—of course, all take those matters into consideration. But I'm glad to have them here; I'm glad to have them express their views. I think the Congress should consider their views carefully, and I hope that in their consideration they will consider the whole problem of trade, and I do think we should realize that the balance of trade has been in our favor and the gold flow would have been substantially worse if we had not had this favorable balance of trade.

[19.] Q. Mr. President, in relation to the gold problem, the outgoing administration has ordered a cutback in the number of American military and civilian dependents stationed abroad in the so-called hard-currency nations. The day before your inaugural the outgoing Defense Secretary advised your incoming Defense Secretary in a manner urging that relief should be sought as soon as possible because of what the outgoing Defense Secretary termed the "ad-

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verse affect of the order on the morale of the military." Have you had a chance to make up your mind on that position, sir?

THE PRESIDENT. Mr. McNamara and Mr. Dillon have discussed the effect of this order on military morale, military strength, the rate of reenlistment. It's really a question of determining what alternative steps can be secured which would be less harmful but which would protect the flow of gold. I do expect to make some reference to this matter of gold outflow in the State of the Union Address. I will send within a 2-week period after the State of the Union Address a message to the Congress dealing with the gold outflow and our recommendations for meeting it and we will at that time come to some judgment as to whether a more satisfactory method of protecting our gold could be secured than providing for the return of the families of Americans serving abroad in the military.

I will say that our study so far has convinced us that the dollar must be protected, that the dollar can be protected at its present value, that exchange controls are not essential, but it is a most serious problem and it will be the subject of a message to the Congress.

[20.] Q. Mr. President, the State of New York gave you one of your handsomest majorities in the 1960 election campaign, but now the Democrats of New York are rather bitterly divided over leadership. As the leader of the Democratic Party nationally, are you going to take some steps to try and heal the splits in New York?

THE PRESIDENT. Well the people in New York, the Democratic organizations in New York, who are interested in the success of the Democratic Party, they have to make their judgments as to what kind of a party they want to build there. I have asked Mr.

Bailey, the new chairman of the Democratic Party, to lend a helping hand in attempting to alleviate some of the distress. [Laughter]

[21.] Q. Sir, do you have any plans for quick Federal aid for the unemployed?

THE PRESIDENT. We are going to send a message to the Congress right after the State of the Union Address on what steps we think the Government could profitably take to provide protection for the unemployed and also to stimulate the economy. On the immediate question, I will discuss that in the State of the Union Address on Monday.

[22.] Q. Mr. President, now that the Soviets have released the RB-47 fliers, will you estimate for us the chances of you meeting with Premier Khrushchev?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes. There is no relationship, nor has there been, in the discussion between the two matters. And therefore I have no—there has been no change in my previous statement that there are no plans at the present time for meeting with Mr. Khrushchev.

[23.] Q. Mr. President, will you tolerate the continued abuse of Executive privilege to suppress information which is needed by Congress? For instance, now that you are President, will you direct the USIA to give the Senate Foreign Relations Committee those prestige polls which you urged the previous administration to make available during the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, let me say that I would have no objection at all to the polls, or at least the results of the polls, being made available. And I'd be delighted to check in and see what we can do about making it available to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or the House Foreign Relations Committee, if they would like them.

Q. Mr. President, about the abuses regarding the privilege to suppress all sorts of in-

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formation. What is your position on that?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, that's a statement, really, not completely a question, in—

Q. Sir, but you yourself agreed—

THE PRESIDENT. That's why I stated that I thought that it would be well to release these polls and that's why I said I'd be glad to release these polls. Now if other matters come up, we'll have to make a judgment whether it is an abuse or whether it is within the constitutional protections given to the Executive, and I would hope that we can within the limits of national security make available information to the press and to the people, and I do think that it would be helpful to release the polls which we discussed last fall.

Q. Mr. President, Press Secretary Salinger said today, indicated today, there might be a need for a tightening of information on national security. Doesn't the policy of deterrence require that the enemy have knowledge of our strength and the ability to carry them out and wouldn't there be a risk of possible miscalculation by tightening up information?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I think that the enemy is informed of our strength. I think Mr. Salinger in his statement today at lunch indicated his judgment based on his experience so far, that there had been very ample information given so that the enemy can make a determination as to our strength. I am anxious that we have a maximum flow of information but there quite obviously are some matters which involve the security of the United States, and it's a matter on which the press and the Executive should attempt to reach a responsible decision.

I could not make a prediction about what those matters will be, but I think that all of us here are aware that there are some matters which it would not be well to discuss at particular times so that we just have to

wait and try to work together and see if we can provide as much information as we can within the limits of national security. I do not believe that the stamp "National Security" should be put on mistakes of the administration which do not involve the national security, and this administration would welcome any time that any member of the press feels that we are artificially invoking that cover. But I must say that I do not hold the view that all matters and all information which is available to the Executive should be made available at all times, and I don't think any member of the press does. So it's a question of trying to work out a solution to a sensitive matter.

[24.] Q. Mr. President, in the past few days the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, has issued statements—one with your name on it—to the effect that this country wants a return to quiet private diplomacy. Could you give us some idea of the meaning behind this, Mr. President? Are you trying to suggest to Khrushchev that you'd like to resort to this for the time being without offending him or making him go off the cordial path he's on at the present time?

THE PRESIDENT. Would you—the last part of that—

Q. Are you trying to suggest to Mr. Khrushchev by the tone of these—by what you're saying in these statements—that you don't want a summit meeting now and you'd like to go through private channels, and trying to do this without offending him or getting him off the cordial path he's on now?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I would just say—without accepting the question completely as a premise—I would say that the Secretary of State is anxious to explore with interested countries what chance we have of lessening world tension which is—in some areas of the world—is quite high tonight.

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And therefore there are occasions when traditional exchanges between diplomats and the countries involved are in the national interest. And that, I think, is what Mr. Rusk is directing his attention to. And I'm hopeful that from those more traditional exchanges we can perhaps find greater common ground.

[25.] Q. Sir, do you favor Senator Humphrey's suggestion that we send surplus food to Red China through the U.N. or CARE, or some similar organization?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I'd say two things: firstly, Red China—the Chinese Communists—are exporting food at the present time, some of it to Africa, some of it going, I think, to Cuba, and therefore that is a factor in their needs for food from abroad.

Secondly, we've had no indication from the Chinese Communists that they would welcome any offer of food. I'm not anxious to offer food if it's regarded merely as a propaganda effort by the United States. If there is a desire for food and a need for food, then the United States would be glad to consider that need, regardless of the source. If people's lives are involved—if there is a desire for food—the United States will consider it carefully. I do say that in this case, however, there are these examples of food being exported during this present time or recent history and, secondly, there has been a rather belligerent attitude expressed towards us in recent days by the Chinese Communists and there is no indication, direct or indirect, private or public, that they would respond favorably to any acts by the United States.

[26.] Q. Mr. President, the task force report on space has been criticized as partisan opinion. There also has been criticism that the report was made without any contact with NASA officials, without any attempt at liaison during the transition period.

And there is concern that no one has so far been named to head the agency. Could you comment on these charges, sir?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I don't—the task force was free to make the kind of report that in their best judgment the events called for. The task force was made up of men of broad experience in this field. I think it was really a blue-ribbon panel. They presented their views. I don't think anyone is suggesting that their views are necessarily in every case the right views. I am hopeful—we have appointed an acting director—and I'm hopeful that before the week is out we will have a director of NASA.

[27.] Q. Mr. President, you have directed your departmental heads to take a new look at the Eisenhower budget. I wonder—with indications that you may have some partial revisions with this budget—can you now say whether you hope or expect to live within the \$80,900 million spending figure which your predecessor laid down?

THE PRESIDENT. I would—that study of the budget is now going on and I couldn't give you an answer yet. We haven't finished our study.

[28.] Q. Mr. President, your Inaugural Address was unusual in that you dealt only with America's position in the world. Why, Mr. President, did you limit yourself to this global theme?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, because the issue of war and peace is involved, and the survival of the planet, possibly our system. And, therefore, this is a matter of primary concern to the people of the United States and the people of the world.

Secondly, I represent a new administration. I think the views of this administration are quite well known to the American people, and will become better known in the next month. I think that we are new,

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however, on the world scene, and therefore I felt there would be some use in informing countries around the world of our general view on the questions which face the world and divide the world.

[29.] Q. Mr. President, you have spoken of the situation where there are crises in the world now. One of these crises is Laos. Do you have any hope that a political settlement can be negotiated there?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, as you know, the British Government has presented to the Soviet Union—and to the best of my information an answer has not been received by the British—a proposal to reestablish the International Control Commission. We ought to know shortly whether there's any hope that that commission can be reestablished. As to the general view on Laos, this matter is of great concern to us. The United States is anxious that there be established in Laos a peaceful country—an independent country not dominated by either side but concerned with the life of the people within the country.

We are anxious that that situation come forward. And the United States is using its influence to see if that independent country, peaceful country, uncommitted country, can be established under the present very difficult circumstances.

[30.] Q. Mr. President, in discussing with the Soviet Union the release of the RB-47 fliers, did we also take up with Mr. Khrushchev the fate of Francis Gary Powers, a U-2 pilot, and the 11 fliers who are missing from the C-130 which was shot down inside Armenia in 1958?

THE PRESIDENT. The matter of the 11 fliers was discussed and Mr. Khrushchev—the Russians rather—have stated that their previous public statements on these fliers represent their view on the matter: that the newspaper—magazine story which was written

by an Eastern German does not represent the facts. So that that would—on the matter of Mr. Powers, we have not discussed him at this time because he is in a different category than the fliers that were released. One was an overflight and the other was a flight of a different nature.

Q. Did the Russians ask any *quid pro quo* or did we make any concessions to them in exchange for the release of these fliers? If not, how do you account for this remarkable turnabout in their relations with us?

THE PRESIDENT. They did not. The statement which I have made is the statement which the United States Government put forward on this matter, which I read to you earlier in regard to overflights. I would not attempt to make a judgment as to why the Soviet Union chose to release them at this time. I did say in my statement that this had removed a serious obstacle in the way of peaceful relations between the Soviet Union and the United States and I would judge that they desired to remove that serious obstacle.

Q. Mr. President, did they accept a reassurance of no more overflights as an exchange?

THE PRESIDENT. It is a fact that I have ordered that the flights not be resumed, which is a continuation of the order given by President Eisenhower in May of this year.<sup>1</sup>

[31.] Q. Mr. President, your own election has stimulated renewed proposals for electoral reform. Do you have any objection to changing the present method of electing Presidents or do you favor any of the proposals?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I do have some thoughts on it. One, that in the first place, having been through the experience in '56,

<sup>1</sup> See 1960-61 volume, this series, pp. 440-441.

*John F. Kennedy, 1961*

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I think it was, of an attempt to substantially change the electoral college, it's my judgment that no such change can secure the necessary support in the House, the Senate, and in the States of the Union. The area where I do think we perhaps could get some improvement would be in providing that the electors would be bound by the results of the State elections. I think that that is a—would be a useful step forward.

The electors—after all, when the people vote they assume that the votes are going to be cast in a way which reflects the judgment of a majority of the people of the State and therefore I think it would be useful to have that automatic and not set up this independent group who could vote for the candidate who carried the State or not, depending on their own personal views. That would be the first thing.

Secondly, I'm hopeful that the Congress would consider the suggestions made, I think, first by President Theodore Roosevelt and later by Senator Richard Neuberger, of having the National Government participate in the financing of national campaigns, because the present system is not satisfactory.

Perhaps it would be useful to go into that in more detail later because I do think it's a most important subject. But I would say for the present that this matter of the electors would be an area where I think we could usefully move.

[32.] Q. Mr. President, on a related subject, without being morbid, have you given any consideration to the problem which President Eisenhower resolved with his Vice President—that is, the problem of the succession in case of injury, illness, or some incapacitation—some agreement with the Vice President such as your predecessor had?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes. Well, I haven't developed that at this present time, though I do think that President Eisenhower's decision was a good one, and I think it would be a good precedent. Nothing's been done on it as yet, but I think it would be a good matter on which we could proceed.

Reporter: Thank you, Mr. President.

NOTE: President Kennedy's first news conference, broadcast over radio and television, was held in the State Department Auditorium at 6 o'clock on Wednesday evening, January 25, 1961.

## 9 Letter to Secretary Ribicoff Requesting Him To Undertake Direction of Cuban Refugee Activities. *January 27, 1961*

*Dear Mr. Secretary:*

I want you to undertake responsibility, effective February 1, for directing the Cuban refugee activities now being conducted by the Executive branch of the Federal government, and to make an on-the-scene investigation of the problem within the next week as my personal representative.

I want you to make concrete my concern and sympathy for those who have been forced from their homes in Cuba, and to assure them that we shall seek to expedite

their voluntary return as soon as conditions there facilitate that. I believe that the present program can best be strengthened by directly bringing to bear your personal leadership and the vast welfare, health, and other skills of your Department. I am anxious that you make use of private services available for the refugees to the greatest extent possible.

Both here at home and abroad, I want to re-emphasize most strongly the tradition of the United States as a humanitarian sanc-



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